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ABSTRACT

Physical education (including special/adapted) is currently at a crossroads in its professional life. Analysis reveals that physical education professionals have failed to develop a grass-roots constituency which acts as an advocate when physical education's existence in the public schools is in jeopardy. One method which might circumvent this dilemma is to initiate a sales strategy. This paper shares six power strategies for selling. (1) Never begin a sales call with a presentation. It establishes one-way communication rather than dialogue. (2) Point out only those features/benefits of the product to which the prospect can relate; focus on the specific value the product will have for the prospect. (3) Encourage resistance and deal with it openly and honestly. (4) Make sure the initial sales call includes at least one request by either the salesperson or the customer for a small favor. This helps to build a continuing relationship. (5) Maintain a dialogue with the prospect. A call every other month is generally not acceptable. (6) Present new and useful information to the prospect each time you make a call. (JMK)

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES IN THE FUTURE: WHERE ARE WE GOING AND WHAT WILL WE BE DOING?[1]

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[1]Invited dinner speech at the Midwest Conference on Physical Education/Recreation for the Disabled and Handicapped, LaCrosse, Wisconsin, April, 1981.

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PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES IN
THE FUTURE: WHERE ARE WE GOING
AND WHAT WILL WE BE DOING?

INTRODUCTION

When the chronicle of physical education for special populations is finally written, the decade of the 1970's will doubtlessly appear as the Golden Age. This decade which ushered in an era of vast expansionism in the speciality area known as special/adapted physical education was embued with an artifical ligitimacy. It was fostered by enormous amounts of federal dollars emanating from the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped of the Office of Education (HEW). The 1970's took on the appearance of a giant fiscal bubble which kept getting larger and larger and which many of us unrealistically convinced ourselves would never break. I think, we all patently realized that the bubble would break, i.e., monies were destined to "dry-up"; we just did not think it would happen so soon or so suddenly. Consequently, as we have proceeded into the 1980's, we have come to realize that a realistic problem confronts us. The problem, however, extends far beyond a diminution of training funds, the concomitant difficulty of filling man-power needs, and the ultimate disruption of direct service delivery. The problem is not aloof; it is solvable.

While we have been engaged in most of the fundamentally important aspects of our profession, e.g., program development, pre-service and inservice training, and establishment of research agenda, we have (it appears to me) neglected to do one very important thing - we have failed to systematically developed a grass-roots constituency. By grass-roots, I mean, John and Mary Average Citizen. Therefore, when we have to fight (I did not say "if"; I said when) the battle for our political lives, we may be left with minimal partisan support at best. This issue is probably more germane to a larger discussion of physical education in general; however, since we are so inextricably tied to our generalist colleagues, the issue has direct bearing on us.

Obviously, physical education programs (including those for special populations) are designed with only those persons in mind who are immediately affected , i.e., students. However, there is a considerable group (we call them taxpayers) who pay the price tag for what we do in physical education and with whom we would be well advised to develop an articulative relationship.

Therefore, I do not consider the decade of the 70's as the Golden Age. Rather it seems that the next 10 to 15 years could well prove to be that AGE - if we, as a profession, engage in at least one vitally important function. SELLING is that function. If we are to achieve a Golden Age relative to Special/Adapted Physical Education in the next decade or two, we must begin to engage in those activities which are necessary to sustain and endear ourselves to our many publics; therefore, we must sell ourselves.

I am well aware that the idea of selling ourselves will make many individuals uncomfortable. Most of us are convinced that what we do and what we provide for students is important; and consequently, we see little or no need to justify beyond reasonably limits our raison d'etre. Herein lies the problem. Not only are we, as a profession, apolitical (special/adapted physical education personnel are much further ahead in this area compared to our generalist colleagues), but we also lack skills in selling (salespersonship). We have never had to sell, because we have always had a captive audience.[1] We have always been (at least in contemporary history) a viable part of the school curriculum; however, as budget constraints continue to plague school districts, programs such as physical education will continue to be eliminated, minimum state requirements notwithstanding.

[1] It is with some interest that we analyze the current burgeoning of recreation programs. Recreation fares much better in its day-to-day articulation with its constitutency since it has traditionally been in a position of having to sell its product to individuals or groups who have been free to come and go as they please.

Success in the decades of the 80's and 90's is tied to recognizing that we must cultivate a strong and enduring relationship with our constitutency - not only students but also (and more importantly) with the tax paying public. Why? The reason is simple. Education (in some form) is an institution. Since it is institutionalized, it will in all likelihood endure. Special education and physical education are not institutionalized; they do not possess enduring qualities. If they did, we would not be fearful of impending budgetary cutbacks at federal, state, and local levels. Please do not interpret this as an alarmist attitude but rather as a realistic encounter with certain facts of life which most, if not all of us, are vitally aware, albeit we may choose to examine our current and future prospects for survival through proverbal rose colored glasses.

NEW SELLING STRATEGIES

Relative to the taxpaying public, selling as described in this paper is an indirect process which is accomplished by influencing physical education teachers who instruct special populations, administrators who facilitate compliance with P.L. 94-142, parents of special needs students, and the students themselves. Therefore this presentation has something for special/adapted physical educators who practice their trade at the university level and who attempt to influence career teachers as well as practicing teachers who are working to affect change in administrators, students, and parents relative to the provision of physical education for special populations.

Subsequent to determining where one's sphere of influence lies, implementation of several selling strategies[2] may potentially engender the greatest and most positive results. These strategies will now be presented with emphasis on selling physical education for special populations.

1. Never begin a sales call with a presentation. It establishes one-way communication rather than DIALOGUE!

Perhaps this strategy is no more frequently abused than in the area of inservice training. Special/adapted physical education consultants who are charged with the responsibility of training regular physical education personnel to teach special populations are frequently guilty of presenting information to teachers (the assumption apparently being that the specialist has all the answers and teachers need only do what they are told and everything will be fine). Instead of talking at or to teachers the specialist who is, in fact, trying to sell a new attitude and a concomitant way of behaving would be well advised to strive for two-way communication, i.e., a dialogue. This would have the effect of establishing a partnership. Participants in inservice programs would feel that their contributions were valued; consequently, they would conceivably be more inclined to implement many of the concepts, principles, and procedures which are invariably discussed in such programs.

[2]The author of these selling strategies as well as their original source of publication is unknown.

Another arena which is constantly misused is the parents' and advocacy groups. When presentations are made to groups such as these, the opportunity for a constructive and viable dialogue is seldom provided. More often than not the person invited to speak (e.g., a special/adapted physical educator) makes a presentation about an existing program or perhaps what a projected program might do and then proceeds to accept questions from the audience. Again no dialogue is established; individuals are made to feel that their opinions and ideas are basically worthless. The result is little in the way of a long term sales effect.

Although this notion of establishing a dialogue is simple, its use by educators has been sadly undervalued. As evidence we have only to analyze the trend in recent years to include handicapped individuals in their own program development - interesting that it took so long to realize that having a dialogue was better than telling these individuals what they needed.

2. Point out only those features/benefits of the product to which the prospect can relate; focus on the specific value the product will have for the prospect.

The important consideration here centers on the perceived value of physical education by society. It is here that what our generalist colleagues do by way of regular physical education programs affect what we, as special/adapted personnel, will be able to provide in an institutionalized sense. More directly, if regular physical educators continue to offer programs which are marginal, at best, then our future in public schools is clear. Programs for special populations will be non-existent since regular programs will be curtailed.

If this catastrophic occurrence is to be forestalled, then physical educators (generalist and specialist) must initiate a selling strategy (we must, however, sell a viable product). We must sell programs for students, to students. Students of all ages, ability levels, developmental levels, and both genders must be convinced that our programs can affect change in their lives. Parents must be lead to understand the nature of effective physical education programs and how these programs can affect change in their childrens' lives. Teachers (physical educators and others) must likewise be lead to understand the unique contributions physical education can make to growth and development especially as it relates to the developmental needs of special populations. All three groups, i.e., students, parents, and teachers, are capable of making logical decisions once the facts are clearly presented; however, in conjunction with the first strategy, a dialogue is essential if maximum impact is to be realized.

3. Encourage resistance and deal with it openly and honestly.

This third sales strategy probably seems counterproductive to the notion of selling someone a product; however, what an effective seller should do is openly encourage overt resistance to acceptance of the product (concept, idea). Many groups will be openly resistant to the idea of quality physical education programs for special populations. Our responsibility is to acknowledge that resistance exists and then to deal as effectively as we can with it. A major consideration is again the establishment of a dialogue.

Once the dialogue is begun it is intelligent to expect that the various groups will begin to elaborate upon the less beneficial aspects of physical education for special populations. Teachers will tell you about the burdens that mainstreaming handicapped students will produce in their classes, how they do not have enough time to spend with only one or two special students, and how their own training never prepared them for this responsibility. Administrators will resist because they foresee additional staff demands, scheduling difficulties, space limitations, and generally more problems caused by serving this population than by disavowing their rights to this part of the curriculum. Physicians will resist the movement to include handicapped students in physical education. They will write "waivers" for their patients which conceivably excuse their patients from gym. This kind of behavior is totally irresponsible and, in fact, does not have to be (and should not be) honored by the school district or the State Board of Education. Parents will resist having their handicapped child take physical education. Some of this resistance may be the result of fear that the child may be injured; some may be the result of previously negative experiences in physical education. Whatever the cause of the parents' resistance it must be met openly. The same is true for all the groups mentioned previously. Their concerns are real; most, if not all, of their questions and concerns can be answered logically. We have data to justify physical education for special population - why not use it? (Answers to specific questions raised in this section are beyond the scope of this paper).

As a final aspect of this section, I think it is important to acknowledge that many of the very students for whom we are fighting to develop programs will also resist. This sounds strange but maybe it should not. If, in fact, handicapped persons are more similar to "normal" persons than dissimilar, then it should be expected that a percentage of handicapped persons will not wish to engage in physical education. Many are borderline; they have had bad experiences in the past, are self-conscious, or maybe just inhibited. Whatever the cause school-aged handicapped persons must realize that P.L. 94-142 which is, in effect, civil rights legislation implies that they cannot be denied physical education services. When resistance is encounter, I think, it is totally appropriate to insist that rights beget responsibilities, and responsibility at least in terms of physical education means participating to the best of one's ability - just as the non-handicapped students participate.

4. Make sure the initial sales call includes at least one request by either the salesperson or the customer for a small favor. This helps to build a continuing relationship.

This fourth strategy, although it sounds simple, is probably the most difficult to implement. The reason that this rather simple sounding strategy is difficult is that it requires commitment. Someone has to do something. If this strategy can be initiated, then the likelihood of making a sale is greatly enhanced.

It is to this strategy that we now direct our attention as a crucial determinant of our ability to sell successfully the idea of physical education for special populations. Throughout this paper discussion had centered on our many publics, i.e., groups that comprise our clientele; these have included: teachers, administrators, parents, students, and taxpayers. The first four groups will serve as the nucleus of this discussion.

In our continual dialogue with teachers we must at some point ask for a commitment to experience some of the concepts and principles we have been talking about. To facilitate this process an effective approach has been to ask the teacher to try-out the different methods and procedures with just one handicapped student first. It is then probable that additional students can and will be added. One thing that assures this probability is the reinforcement and technical assistance that the special/adapted physical education professional can provide in this arrangement.

Administrators, especially building principals, are probably the single most important variable in the eventual success or failure of physical education for special populations. Many may not be aware of the school's responsibility to provide physical education to special populations; others may be knowledgeable but choose not to "muddy the waters" with one more mandated program. Regardless of the reason, advocates of physical education programs for special populations must engage administrators in meaningful dialogue, but beyond discussion they must encourage principals to regain their stature as instructional leaders. One way to accomplish this feat is to provide them with well-conceived plans for implementing change (where change is needed) to accommodate special students in physical education. This could mean suggesting plans for placement alternatives, assessment, IEP development and implementation, and staff training to name a few. By asking the principal to react to these plans, one has opened the door to further negotiation and perhaps commitment to a purpose.

Parents are another group which continually are bombarded by descriptions of programs and ideas. Very little is ever asked of the parent other than their unswerving loyalty to program after program. Perhaps we, in physical education, should ask parents to become more actively involved in their child's physical and motor development. Cannot we encourage parents to observe their children while engage in play? To observe and record movement? To develop a feel for how the motor and social domains interrelate? If we develop this kind of articulation with parents, they will be more likely to act as our allies when it comes time to justify our existence.

Students need encouragement also. Many handicapped youngsters and young adults are very resistent to what we would have them do in physical education (and in some cases because of a previous program or a teacher this resistance is understandable). As with the other groups we can sell these students on physical education if we can just get them to try something, one sport or one skill. Using a personal experience, I had an above-the-elbow amputee who was adament about having to take physical education. After a 2 hour counseling session I asked her to try racquetball. To make a long story short, she loved the game; she joined a club and now plays 3 times a week. This success is based upon selling strategy #4 - I asked for a small favor and the customer gave herself a lifelong gift.

5. Maintain a dialogue with the prospect. A call every other month is generally not acceptable.

Subsequent to establishing a dialogue with any of the groups or publics as we have referred to them in this paper, it is equally important to maintain the dialogue. This implies a continuous and on-going articulation, one which places the customer, i.e., teachers, parents, and students in a reciprocal relationship with the seller, i.e., us. Several examples are illustrative of this strategy and include teachers, parents, and students.

We continually strive to establish a dialogue with career teachers through the vehicle of inservice training. Most inservice training consists of one shot programs/presentations where specialists come in and tell everything they know in one hour. Teachers go home; the specialists return to their shop, and for the most part nothing basic has changed. The obvious shortcoming to this approach is that a dialogue is neither established nor is it in a state where it can be initiated and nurtured. Consequently, the chances of selling teachers on physical education for special populations is significantly diminished. Good practice dictates that once the dialogue is initiated it is vitally important to maintain contact on a regular basis. This provides the teacher with needed support, and also it increases the likelihood that the seller will be there to reinforce those behaviors and attitudes which are conducive to providing effective programs of physical education for special populations.

Parents also require a mechanism for maintenance of the dialogue. Several ideas come to mind. First, parents as taxpayers have a vested interest in the operation of their schools; consequently, their inclusion and active solicitation to sit on advisory boards is strongly encouraged. Second, a dialogue can be maintained through a well-planned program of parent volunteers for either the regular program of physical education, the adapted physical education class, and/or special sports days.

Students need to feel that they too can engage in a dialogue with teachers. Many may be apprehensive about their first formal physical education experience. Subsequently, they may require additional support to maintain their interest. These "booster shots" of encouragement are part of the process we labeled dialogue - before boosters are effective the initial dialogue has had to be have been successful. Therefore, once a sale is made whether it is to teachers, parents, or students, the salesperson must maintain a dialogue else the product, i.e., physical education for special populations, becomes like the new car which is constantly in the garage for the same problem because the service department does not perform as competently and professionally as the car salesperson. Let's not tarnish our product because we fail to service it effectively.

6. Present new and useful information to the prospect each time you make a call.

The final strategy which will be discussed in this paper centers on the continuous dissemination of vital information. Vital information for the purposes of this paper implies resource data which builds upon information which has already been disseminated and which helps the customer come to grips with progressively more interesting and complex issues and problems. As in strategy #5 three groups seem to require this tactic; these include teachers, parents and students.

When we work with teachers to either develop and/or refine their skills and knowledges for working with special populations in physical education, it is imperative that we provide them with useful information each and every time we see/work with them. We must expose them to more complex concepts and principles; however, this must be done in a progressive manner such that they are not overwhelmed. We know that the best mechanism for doing this is to engage them in their own school setting where issues and problem take on a "real world" context.

Parents must be continually provided with new information. One method to accomplish this goal is to establish a network (i.e., community-based, school-based) of parents or professionals who can provide the latest information relative to the concerns of the group. Physical education programs can contribute to this end since parents seem to be looking for opportunities for their children to engage in sport and leisure pursuits.

When the discussion turns to students, physical education personnel who are selling physical education to special populations should also utilize strategy #6. Students must be lead to understand the benefits to be derived from participation in sport and physical education. Once sold on the idea students must be presented continually with new cha'lenges so their growth and development in the area is assured. With this kind of progressive and expanding program, handicapped individuals will be able to adjust better to their abundant leisure time after their school years are completed.

CONCLUSION

Physical education (including special/adapted) is currently at a crossroads in its professional life. For those of us interested in special/adapted, our future is inextricably tied to that of our generalist colleagues. We, and they, have need of self-analyzation. I believe this analysis will reveal that we have failed to develop a grass-roots constituency which will act as an advocate for us when our existence in the public schools is in jeopardy.

One method which conceivably could circumvent this dilemma is to initiate a sales strategy. Selling is not something that educators have had to do; consequently, they lack skills necessary to do it well. This paper has shared six power strategies for selling which, if implemented, could provide the strong partisan support necessary to overcome the all to prevalent policy of cutting back on physical education when budgets get tight. Examples were provided from the specialization area known as special/adapted physical education. Physical education for special populations is a viable component of the total educational process (as is physical education for regular students). We must never assume, however, that we are indispensable.